

Interview

By Mark Sladen

Mark Sladen: The central element of your exhibition at Charlottenborg is a replica of the Marionet Teatret from Copenhagen's 'King's Garden'. What is the piece of theatre that is being performed in this structure?

Simon Starling: The piece of puppet theatre acts as a condensed, comic retrospective in that it takes works of mine made since 1997, all of which involved boats in one way or another, and collapses them into a single, somewhat calamitous, narrative. Works such as *Shedboatshed* (2005) and *Red River (In Search of the Elusive Okapi)* (2009), which originally emerged as responses to very specific sites and circumstances, are here strung together in a single drama – which is being played out under the direction of Edward Lloyd Pierce, and with the help of Paul Arne Kring and other long-time collaborators from the Marionet Teatret. The work is also the latest in a group of pieces in which I transplant structures – for a long time I've been interested in the possibility of collapsing one place or time onto another, and the 'restaging of the stage' that is happening at Charlottenborg is very much a part of that interest.

The other major piece in the exhibition, *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)*, is also highly theatrical in nature. What is your interest in theatre and performance?

I suppose I'm increasingly preoccupied by ideas of restaging or reinterpretation. I've been struck by the sense of freedom that the stage seems to allow, particularly within the tradition of Japanese Noh theatre. On the Noh stage time and space are in constant flux, ghosts assume human form, the young become old, the old young, journeys are made, and so forth. *Project for a Masquerade* evolved out of a rather complex web of historical events surrounding a particular sculpture by the British modernist Henry Moore, and it became clear that the freedom of the Noh stage might allow me to find a form for the complex web of facts and fiction that had emerged from my investigation into the bizarre double-life of Moore's sculpture.

A number of your works evoke stories and characters from the Cold War. What is your interest in this episode in history?

While I began my career as an artist after the end of the Cold War, I suppose to some extent my political consciousness was formed in its last decades, and its end perhaps marks a moment of shift from a world defined by politics and political difference to one defined largely by economics, and in turn globalisation. Both these periods of history have defined and fuelled my art practice. Maybe now, at a slight historical distance, the narratives of the Cold War can be understood afresh and be redeployed within this globalised world.

Mark Sladen is director of Kunsthall Charlottenborg